



TRIBAL CLIMATE RESILIENCY: Summary Report

In January 2021, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and its partners held the second in a series of virtual Tribal Climate Leadership Forum events featuring a distinguished speaker panel of Tribal Elders, youth, and climate resiliency leaders.

Over 950 people registered from a broad array of sectors and geographies across the US and Canada. The event was planned and hosted by a diverse and creative planning committee from across the US. The event created a forum for learning about policies and practices and aimed to engage leadership and staff in building resilience to meet pressing, complex challenges Indigenous Communities face.

Event participants spoke about how climate adaptation planning promotes resiliency and increases tribal engagement; illustrated regional examples of adaptation planning/action across several facets of tribal climate resiliency; and engaged our youth in designing resilient futures for all Tribal Nations.

Tribal Invocation

Jefferson Green, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs



Mr. Green opened the event with wise words of hope, reflection, and a call to action: “Let this invocation and gathering help us all come here together. We are going through a lot and have been through a lot. Every day we are thankful to come together to grow and learn on this earth. Prayers and good love to all.”

Moderators



Terri Parr Wynecoop, Spokane Tribe, Executive Director of Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and Joel Moffett, Nez Perce Tribe, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians

The moderators kept the conversation lively among summit speakers. They recognized the deep connection each speaker has to tribal climate resiliency and acknowledged their willingness to share very important expertise in creating a more resilient future.

Welcome



Leonard Forsman, Suquamish Tribal Chairman and ATNI President

Chairman Forsman spoke to the threat of the climate crisis and our way of life. He said while we have already “been at this for decades,” we have a “sacred duty to hold people responsible and accountable for the commitments” to protect the earth and our people. The need for climate action, he noted, has always been pitted against the economy. Now is the time to “work together to tell people that a sustainable economy is possible, and it can also address climate change.”



Chief Kirk Francis Sr. President of USET, and Chief of the Penobscot Indian Nation in Maine

Chief Francis offered opening comments and introduced Congresswoman Deb Haaland by commending her as a “woman of many firsts and a passionate contributor and her commitment to sovereign rights.” He welcomed her transformative opportunity to serve as the nations’ new Secretary of Interior. He acknowledged the existential threat of climate change to our people, land, and cultures. Having a seat at the policy table will contribute to “Indigenous sensibility, cultural resources, and traditional knowledge.”

Keynote Speaker



Deb Haaland, Laguna Pueblo Tribe, Congresswoman for New Mexico’s 1st District

Secretary Haaland, nominee as United State Secretary of the Interior, spoke about the power of Indigenous People leading the way in sustainable solutions and protecting all ways of life.

She spoke of the need for sacrifices today in order to ensure a life for future generations. She seamlessly tied the threats from environmental injustice to the threat of climate change as “mirrored in communities of color across this nation.” She went on to say that everything is harder with climate change. For Indigenous People it is endangering cultural practices and our most precious resources of clean and abundant water and clean air.”

She knows the Indigenous way of life, “I was taught to respect our resources and that everything in nature is connected.” As a leader in Biden’s cabinet, she will support the nation’s efforts to *Build Back Better* and address environmental challenges through the lens of equity. Her fervent hope is that we will turn this crisis around and bring solutions that are inclusive of all voices.

She expressed hope in new opportunities for threatened communities. With President Biden and Vice President Harris at the helm she is confident in “productive, collaborative, and nation-to-nation relationships” and the priority to “repair our international environmental relationships.”

Her call to action was for all of us to be fierce. “We are at a critical tipping point” and the land is the “heart of our people.” We must all do our due diligence and not repeat “past failures which have accelerated climate change and put our public lands and all of us at risk.”

Panel Discussion Speakers and Topics

The Summit provide a platform for Tribal Elders and experts to talk about five important facets of climate resiliency of interest to Tribal Communities. They are Coastal Resilience, Infrastructure and Cultural Resilience, Clean Energy and Green Jobs, Food Security, and Water Availability. Panelists offered opening comments, a brief presentation, then engaged in a round table discussion on broader issues of resiliency.

Coastal Resilience – Dr. Kelsey Leonard, Shinnecock Indian Nation



Dr. Leonard spoke to the importance of tribal ocean planning in aquaculture, heritage sites, wampum, submerged cultural resources, autonomy over canoe journey routes, tribal fishing, tribal marine management areas, and climate change.

The [Regional Ocean Partnerships](#) are a forum for federal agencies, states, Tribes, and fishery management councils to work together with stakeholders for coastal resiliency and tribal sovereignty in ocean spaces. She advocated for three bills before Congress which will be crucial to protection of tribal sovereignty and our oceans.

“As Tribal Nations ourselves, we should be working toward that outreach and make sure we are collaborating. We have seen a roll-back of policies. Under this new administration we have an opportunity to build back better and Indigenous led where our voices are heard.”

Infrastructure and Cultural Resilience – Mike Williams, Sr., Native Village of Akiak



Elder Williams from the village of [Akiak](#) spoke to the impacts of global warming on his Tribe and the need for Congress and the President to move forward with urgent, meaningful action. He implored Congress take notice of the extensive costs and impacts to Tribes from global warming. He said, we must “reduce global warming pollution to prevent irreversible harm to the economy and environment” – a harm the Tribes did not cause but have disproportionately borne. He expressed some hope in economic development for tribal low-carbon and renewable energy opportunities.

His powerful testimony called out climate inaction for the dire threat that it is. “Climate change is undermining our social identity and endangering the cultural survival of our native American community. Our health and traditional ways of life are at risk. Our elders are very concerned about our time-honored subsistence practices. People are falling through the thin ice and houses are falling into the ocean. Our rural infrastructure is crumbling. Lakes are drying, berries are disappearing, storms are fiercer, our fish are rotting on drying racks, polar bears are drowning. Our youth and elders are having trouble breathing. Local landscapes are changing, and our coasts are eroding. Tribes are experiencing droughts and increased health risks. Our ice is thinner or entirely gone: if we do not decrease greenhouse emissions, the entire ice cap will melt.”

He closed with, “Our traditional knowledge must be respected, and we be consulted, and our needs honored.”

Clean Energy and Green Jobs – Jana Ganion, Blue Lake Rancheria



Ms. Ganion spoke about the potential of public/private partnerships in creating microgrid clean energy and green jobs which if done well will bring social, economic, and environmental benefits and capacity for Tribes. She praised the improved reliability of climate-smart infrastructure. The microgrids on their [20-acre core campus](#) provide power to about 10% of the region. Microgrids avoid the fallibilities of our electrical grid to cause wildfires.

She called out the digital divide in Indian country and added that “there is also a deployment divide which leads to less access.” Her talk highlighted the need to target support to bridge this divide.

She highlighted their “[Resiliency Training and Innovation Center \(RTIC\)](#) – a comprehensive program that provides paid training and hands-on experience in rural tribal areas. She noted that while training generates new jobs for young people to work in climate-smart fields, the work in this arena “requires new mindsets.”

She sees deployment of clean energy is an economy-enabling investment: “It has expanded our employment by 30%. It has proven up innovation and forged new partnerships. Our investments have refreshed the Tribe’s economic situation.”

She concluded by saying, “Green energy does not occur in a vacuum. Smart infrastructure creates ripple effects and Tribal Governments can provide the policy and financial support to fight climate change.”

Food Security – Jennifer Webster, Oneida Nation



Ms. Webster spoke about the [Oneida Nation’s](#) efforts to create an integrated food system that ensures the health of their people and food security. The Oneida Nation with 17,000 members lives on 65,400 acres of which they own 27,000. The Tribe’s focus on food security was innovated with production, processing, and distribution systems for traditional foods. They are increasing local food production, developing a local food economy, creating a healthy mindset, and improving community access. Their efforts show in their tagline: “*A good mind. A good heart. A strong fire.*”

She spoke of her people’s strong tradition of farming: “We have always been farmers creating local sustainable foods. The three sisters – corn, beans, and squash – were given to us by the creator and made to replenish our bodies. They provide a strong nucleus for food subsistence. For centuries, these three crops have been the center of Native American agriculture and culinary traditions.”

Water Availability – Daryl Vigil, Jicarilla Apache Nation



High Country News

Mr. Vigil spoke about the importance of tribal self-determination over water rights in the Colorado Basin. [Colorado River Interim Guidelines](#), which regulate the flow of water to users, were created in 2007 without tribal consultation and are set to expire in 2026. The 29 Tribal Nations in the upper and lower basins hold some of the river’s most senior water rights and control around 20% of its annual flow.

He outlined what is at stake for the 29 tribal entities who have relied on the bounties of the river for a sustainable living experience for thousands of years. With the area representing the seventh largest economy in the world with 41 million users depending on the water, drought and climate change are causing shortages and uncertainty. He emphasized the need for tribal sovereignty to be honored and for “conversations about conservation.” He said, “The river is over-allocated and doesn’t even meet the sea as it was meant to. You can see the trend here.”

Several times he spoke of the inadequacy of the system: “Every major policy initiative has excluded or not included Tribal Sovereigns in the basin with any kind of recognition of tribal water rights. There is no institutional structure to have any kind of dialogue. It falls on the basin states and BLM with no precedence for the Tribes to participate.”

He concluded by sharing that the impact on native Tribes during the COVID 19 pandemic has been dire. “We haven’t had any way to shelter in place during the pandemic. People traveled and then they got COVID. It’s almost impossible to navigate the resources for Tribes because they weren’t built for Tribes. We need pathways to get resources where they are needed.”

Concluding comments from the panel

Joel Moffett, Nez Perce



“It’s absolutely important to create a vision for how these issues need to be integrated and new ways to hear those voices that need to be heard. If you build a broad consensus now, then we don’t have to circle back to include them later. Include all the voices from the very beginning.”

Jana Ganion, Blue Lake Rancheria



“Tribes are bringing refreshed thinking to Biden’s transition team, and this brings a better footing with respect to our nations and international climate work. For us to be involved in an equitable way, we need to think how Tribal Nations are represented at a more senior level that are completely focused on Tribal Nation relationships. We are seeing great momentum now, but we need to ensure institutionalized pockets of collaboration exist to work on climate and equity issues.”

Jennifer Webster, Oneida Nation



“Because of COVID, our two-week long harvest of the white corn event this year couldn’t bring in the schools. We still held our event, but it was limited. We asked families to engage their children to make a pledge to safe distance, wear a mask, wash their hands; then we would provide a healthy meal. We passed out more than 1000 meals. All those children pledged to be healthy and take steps to stop COVID.”

2021 National Climate Summit Indigenous Youth Video Award Winner

Kelsey Bunting, Puyallup Tribal Citizen

As part of the Summit highlighting skills and wisdom of youth, organizers showed [Circle of Life](#), a compelling video by Kelsey Bunting, a Puyallup Tribal Youth.

The 2021 National Climate Summit Indigenous Youth Video Contest winners can be viewed on the [ATNI website](#).

Kelsey’s video conveys climate change as a natural cycle of life. Our survival skills and spirituality will help Tribes to adapt.

Kelsey spoke about embracing Indigenous identity and reminded everyone that “We are related to all things and in relationship to all things.” She called for people to “be strong for the earth, so she can be strong for us.”



“The winds are whispering of change. We need leaders, shared intelligence, and tenacity. We have an incredible opportunity to speak for the earth and through the lens of Indigenous spirituality. The earth can heal; we can heal and prosper. Plant the seed and speak it into existence. This is the power of our culture.”

Breakout Groups

Each panelist led a breakout group on their area of expertise to answer questions, talk about ways to move from resiliency planning to action, and to create a list of priorities and key messages for the Biden Administration and Congress. A summary from each breakout session can be found as attachments to this report.

Youth Witness Summaries

Youth witnesses observed the summit and participated in the breakout sessions. Ending the summit with messages of hope and action, each youth witness provided closing remarks and personal observations on the discussions that took place in each of the five breakout sessions.

Coastal Resiliency Breakout Session



Chimaway Lopez, Chumash

A key message from our session was that climate change is a globally caused issue, but it is regionally experienced. The impact is disproportionate for Tribal People. Even with the difficult current situation, we are looking to the future with hope and a vision for what we want to build today. But as long as our ocean is sick, our communities will be too, but we are looking for that healing.

We discussed the potential to fight climate change with the support of the [Ocean Based Climate Solutions Act](#) which is leveraging the ocean's potential in the fight against climate change by promoting offshore renewable energy, protecting blue carbon, supporting climate-ready fisheries, expanding marine protected areas, improving ocean health, and more. The potential of the [Magnuson Stevens Act](#) which governs marine fisheries management in US federal waters came up as a resource to learn more about.

We talked about the need to improve inclusion of tribal voices and improve access to the funding needed in order for coastal communities to adapt and build infrastructure to adapt to climate change and maintain tribal ways of life. Non-federally recognized nations on the coast need more representation, inclusion, and access.

Infrastructure and Cultural Resilience Breakout Session



Alexis Wagner, Metlakatla Indian Community

A key message from our session was the critical need to fund Alaskan village relocation and climate change adaptation. We recognized the lack of information exchange about infrastructure needs between these communities and the federal government.

While some communities are not as fully aware of climate change as they could be and can connect with and access resources. [USET Climate Change Tools, Resources, and Publications](#) has an informative website which helps connect Tribes with information and resources through the [Tribal Climate Adaptation Guidebook](#). We're seeing progress with tribal climate change teams accessing and providing these resources to their Tribes which are a huge help in planning and funding infrastructure improvements which will benefit future generations.

Clean Energy and Green Jobs Breakout Session



Coral Avery, Shawnee Tribe

A key message from our session was about the potential of climate smart infrastructure and clean energy development have for expanding employment opportunities not just in renewable energy, but also public safety, regional planning, education, training, and capacity building. Clean energy and green jobs benefit the entire community. Innovative technology should be created by Indigenous People. Rural tribal areas are particularly in need of equitable access, expertise, equipment, funding, and training.

We recognized that renewable energy projects can threaten sacred and cultural sites or impact traditional food gathering. Land-clearing for these huge renewable projects can get complicated, but tribal voices should be consulted. Our voices are not always equitably valued, but we can engage our youth and give them a say in our future. We should value our traditional ways and collaborate in order to move forward with renewable energy.

Food Security Breakout Session



Lindsey Littlesky-Pasena, Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Reservation

Every community is facing climate change differently, but we can learn from each other such as with the Oneida Nation’s food resilience program. Efforts like this take a lot of communication and teamwork. Self-sufficiency builds strong people and community. She said, “Growing a garden pushes out anxiety and connects you with earth itself.” She encouraged people to do something, even if it starts out small. Being self-sufficient magnifies our traditions and keeps them safe while supporting a sustainable life and family on this land.



Nizhoni Toledo, Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Reservation

This discussion made me think about the many benefits of tribal food security. If we take care of the land, it takes care of us. Tribal People’s genetics are different, and we need our foods to be healthy.



Keyen Singer, Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Reservation

Self-sufficiency, access, and protecting access to Indigenous foods was the biggest takeaway and inspiration for me. I am proud of our progress becoming a sustainable family on the reservation. Eating healthy creates happy mentality during this pandemic.

Water Availability Breakout Session



Nicole Kuhn, Haida Nation

A key message from our session was “Water is life.” On the topic of water availability, we need tribal engagement and engaging diversity between Tribes. There is a need for self-determination in tribal water codes and for sovereign interactions. We also discussed increasing kid and youth engagement by building frameworks within our communities for them to communicate, collaborate, and educate. This builds capacity and creates space for youth to engage in climate discussions and events and address the water availability issue now and in the future.

Closing Prayer



Cathy Sampson-Kruse, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Nation

Ms. Kruse reminded us of the tribal invocation: “We are here forever.” Cathy reminded all to remember these words even as we experience the difficult times of COVID and insurrection and have endured the troubles of the past. For the future, she encouraged everyone to stay strong, keep families healthy and safe, and “provide leadership to our young ones as we rise up to protect our land, air, and water.”

Words of Gratitude



Don Sampson, ATNI, former Executive Director of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Nation

Mr. Sampson recognized the incredible contributions of every person who made this Tribal Summit possible.

“Thank you to Rep. Deb Haaland and staff Felicia, Joe, and Naomie for the inspirational message from the first Native American woman Secretary of Interior.

Thanks to our Presidents - ATNI Leonard Forsman and USET Kirk Francis – for their courage and personal commitment to leading not only their respective Tribes, but our inter-Tribal Organizations.

Thanks to our panelists – Kelsey Leonard, Jennifer Webster, Daryl Vigil, Mike Williams, and Jana Ganion – what an amazing group of leaders who illustrate our potential as Indigenous People to transform our communities, Tribal Nations, and the world.

For our spiritual leaders, Jefferson Green and Cathy Sampson-Kruse, we thank you for your prayers, your knowledge, and spiritual strength.

This event included the voices and participation of many Tribal Youth who assisted on the planning committee, serving as observers in the breakout session, and offering closing remarks and personal observations of the event. For our youth leaders – you remind us of why we do this work and what the future holds.

And most important, our gratitude to our Core Team and Steering Committee – each of you made such an important contribution.”

Upcoming Events

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| March 16, 2021 | Empowering Youth Summit |
| May 2021 | Traditional Knowledges Virtual Session IV |
| Fall 2021 | National Tribal Leadership Climate Change Summit
(In-Person TBD) |

Access more [information](#) on upcoming events

Listen to a [recording of this session](#)

